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ABSTRACT

This paper offers the classroom teacher a positive answer for the test anxious student. The writer developed a group testing strategy which is concerned with ways students learn as well as subject matter testing. This evaluation strategy used successfully in high school and college classes is based on group work principles as applied in the classroom. This paper deals with group size, determination of group membership, and cohesive task centered groups. While this paper does not claim the test anxious student will eventually perform better on individual paper and pencil tests, the evidence suggests that students generally, improve test performance when group testing strategies are used. (Author)

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"Did you get your report card in homeroom?"

"You know I did! Look at this report card, would you? I get "A's" on everything I turn in but those tests wipe me out. What'd you get? Another "A" in social studies?"

"Yeah. You only got a "C"? You study as much as I do."

"I know. I don't know what happens to me when I take a test. I can't remember - - can't think - - sometimes, I don't understand the questions even when I read them over and over - - maybe there should be another way to test people like me."

There is another way for the test-anxious student: group testing. For subject matter testing, oral and written group tests can be helpful to the student and the teacher. There are many students who panic in testing situations. As a result, they do poorly on tests and a grade average of "A" on papers and other assignments become a "B" or a "C" quarter or semester grade. Teachers who want to give students every opportunity to demonstrate their ability to think and to solve problems, find many paper and pencil tests lacking. For these students and these teachers, group testing may be the wished for alternative.

This author began using oral group tests in high school psychology and sociology classes at Continuation High School, Spokane, Washington in 1963. Later she used written group tests while teaching graduate courses in counseling and group dynamics at Gonzaga University. In the years in between, then and now, she has taught group testing in courses for teachers and in classrooms as a teacher consultant. In 1972-73, while teaching Korean students in Freshman English classes at Sogang University, Seoul, Korea, written and oral group tests were often used. Through the years individual paper and pencil objective tests, essay exams, and free-answer exams were given for purposes of comparison and to establish validity for group testing.

This method of group testing is based on testing with cohesive groups of students. It is essential that students tested in groups have worked together cooperatively for a period of time prior to the group testing situation.

Students are assigned to groups of five for at least two weeks, or, however long is needed to cover a unit of work, over which the students are to be tested. Assignments are made on the basis of friendship, accumulated grade point average, random choice, or student-teacher decision.

If the student-teacher decision is used, it could be based on a sociological system ensuring that each student would be in a group with at least one other person he or she had chosen and/or with one other person who has chosen him or her. It should be noted that although students frequently ask that the original assignment be made on the basis of friendship, it is from these friendship groups that most requests come for a change to different groups.

After the initial experience, students wanted the teacher to rotate them freely to provide practice experience working with many other students.

Simple get acquainted exercises are used with all but the friendship groups to ascertain that everyone in the group knows each person by name. Use of names should be encouraged with the teacher acting as model.

Guidelines are established by the teacher and students. This is an example of guidelines that could be used:

1. All students are expected to do assigned homework.
2. There are ten minutes at the beginning of each class period for students to review homework with group members.
3. Whenever oral work is done in class, members of the group could help one another in answering questions or in problem solving.
4. When either written or oral tests are given, the students are to confer with members of their group to decide on the "right" or "best" answer and this answer would represent the concensus of the group.
5. Each member of the group receives the group grade.
6. (In 1973, members of a Freshman English class at Sogang University, Seoul, Korea, added: If a group member missed a quiz or a test, the grade of the other group members will not be affected. Result: Students in my class would not even take the three allowed cuts or excused absenses.)

A group test can be written or oral. For the written test only one copy of the questions and one answer booklet should be given to each group of five students. Whether individual or group tests, the tests can follow the same format as any test the classroom teacher would construct to test the thoroughness with which each unit has been covered and understood by the class. In each group the students select one person to write the answers. Another student reads the questions aloud and the paper is then passed on to anyone who did not understand the question when it was read.

Is cheating a problem? It is not likely, if the groups are widely separated from one another and each group is intent on its own work. On written tests, competitiveness among the groups is not important. Each group should be graded on the basis of its understanding of the material and ability to transfer this understanding to similar or quite different situations. (If a teacher should be nervous about cheating on this type of testing, an A form and a B form with the questions in different order or with different but equally weighted questions could be used. That is, however, unnecessary if the teacher is moving from group to group and listening to what is happening in each group.)

While group testing requires cooperative group effort for achievement and success, the reality-centered classroom still demands that individuals and groups be able to handle themselves in competition as well. The cooperative groups can compete against one another during oral examinations. For purpose of talley, the teacher can list each group by name or number on the chalkboard. The agreed upon rules could be as follows:

1. The teacher reads the questions aloud only two times to the group that is to answer the question.
2. A time limit is established; for example, three minutes for the group to confer and answer.
3. A question is addressed to each student in turn and if he or she does not know the answer, anyone in that group could give the answer to that person who then has to relay the answer to the teacher.
4. If the student or group fails to answer within the time limit, the question could be repeated for the next group to answer.
5. Whether the next group answers the question correctly or not, that group does not lose its regular turn to answer a question.
6. Bonus questions of varying degrees of difficulty are given to the room at large and the first student to answer correctly scores a point for his or her group.

7. A point is given for each correct answer. Bonus questions, depending on level of difficulty, could be worth one to five points.

It is important to stress that group members give the correct answer to the student who is addressed to answer the question. Why? Because often this student may know part of the answer and needs help only to complete it or make it correct and acceptable. The value of this rule is in the development of confidence in the text-anxious student.

Of course, confidence is also increased if the student is prepared. Working in cohesive groups, with a group test as its final effort, provides motivation for doing homework. This is, no doubt, because students in these groups develop a sense of responsibility for themselves and for the group. Even when the groups are changed to enable students to work with others, once the new group becomes cohesive, the loyalty to that new group is as strong as the loyalty to the old one.

As was mentioned earlier, to make comparisons between individual and group testing, this author gave written examinations on which students worked independently. Most of the students scored significantly higher on the group tests; oral and written. Results indicated that "A" students continued to do "A" work on most tests whether individual or group. However, the test-anxious students, performed better on group tests, and their test grades were more nearly the same as their grades on papers and other assignments. Particularly in the random groups or those assigned by student-teacher decision, the test-anxious students received and accepted encouragement from their group members which helped them to develop more confidence in their ability to perform. As a result, the quality of their performance rose."C" students working together performed as well on some tests as the "A" students. The average grade in the classes that used group testing was "B". With a very few exceptions, the students,

themselves, felt more learning took place when working in groups than when working independently.

What did group testing mean for the teacher? It made it possible for the teacher to construct tests to meet specific classroom needs. It meant not having to write all easy questions or all difficult ones, but, using questions of middle difficulty, as well. This type of testing also allowed for questions that required students to apply learned information to new situations. A bonus for the teacher was fewer papers to correct.

Group testing has been tried, and, like all methods that have not found full acceptance, is open to further evaluation and modification. What does it profit a student <u>if</u> he gains all "A's" on daily assignments and loses that "A" when he fails the tests?

The End.